

Don't be impatient!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Gardeners are stewards of nature. They follow the seasons, they nurture young plants into mature plants. They know the benefit of bees and they protect snakes and lizards. And they are horribly impatient! Particularly when it comes to vine crops, like cucumbers and squash, they want fruit and they want it right now. A common complaint in early July is that the darn vine has been blooming for nearly two weeks and it still hasn't given me any fruit! Well, this usually means that it's time for the birds and the bees talk - not that the vine crops need bees to pollinate them, which they do, but more specifically, we need to understand the sex life of vine crops. The cucurbits, meaning melons, squash, pumpkins, cucumbers all of those, have separate male and female flowers on the same plant. It's quite easy to tell the difference between the two flowers. The male flower is attached to the vine by a long slender filament. The female flower is attached to the vine by a miniature version of the fruit. If it's a cucumber vine, there is a tiny little cucumber between the flower and the vine. The plant starts with an embryonic fruit and if the flower is properly pollinated it will continue to develop, and if it isn't pollinated, it won't. The kicker is that the male flowers can start blooming 10 to 14 days before the female flowers do. So be patient and wait for the female flowers before you get too excited. The other thing, and this holds for tomatoes as well as vine crops, weather extremes will cause flowers not to set - and that's hot weather as well as cold weather. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Blossom End Rot of Tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is the time of year that tomatoes finally start bearing fruit and excited gardeners, who can't wait for that vine ripened tomato taste call me all in a dither because the bottom of the tomato is turning brown, starting to sink in and rotting away. Gardeners fear not! This is blossom end rot and it is not a pathogen, but a physiological disorder. Think of a teenager where all parts don't grow at the same rate. In the case of a tomato plant, early in the season, the tops tend to grow a lot faster than the roots. Then the top struggles as the roots try to catch up. One thing that happens is that we get physiological leaf rolling as a way to reduce water usage by the plant. The other thing that happens is that we can get short term calcium deficiencies in the plant which then show up as blossom end rot on the tomatoes. Our soils are not deficient in calcium, the plant simply can't move enough calcium. As the root system catches up, this problem goes away on its own. The problem is also going to be a bigger issue in gardens that are heavily fertilized and pushed hard. The extra stimulation from the fertilization is partly to blame. The weather does have some influence on it and we also know that some varieties are more prone to blossom end rot than others. So, don't add calcium or anything else to the soil. Don't spray a fungicide for this condition (you may need for leaf blights, but not blossom end rot). It would be helpful to mulch your tomatoes to keep the soil cool and then water regularly and deeply to avoid soil moisture fluctuations which makes the problem worse. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Grub control on lawns

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Far more lawns are treated for grubs than ever really have problems. Many lawn care companies talk homeowners into paying for an annual treatment without ever having an idea if there is a problem. My advice is don't pay for a lawn treatment unless a problem develops. Grubs are the immature life stage of a scarab beetle that we usually call June bugs. There are several different species of lawn feeding grubs but the most common is the Southern Masked Chafer. These adults, the June bugs, other than being a nuisance aren't much problem. But they do lay eggs. If you think about when you are seeing June bugs, as in NOW, then it makes sense that they start laying eggs soon after you start seeing them. The eggs are laid in the ground and the young grubs hatch out and immediately start feeding on grass roots. At this time the grubs are small and close to the surface. Later on the grubs grow and they start working themselves deeper into the soil. Larger grubs that are deeper in the soil are harder to kill than smaller grubs that are closer to the surface. So, if you are going to treat, look for lots of birds pecking in the soil of your yard or dead spots in the grass where you can easily pull up the sod like it was a cheap carpet, then late July is the best time to do that. There are several products registered and all work well. But it's best if you can water the lawn well first or apply right after a good rain, and then water the product into the soil if it doesn't rain in the first 48 hours or so. You want to get the grubs close to the surface and then wash the chemical down to them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK,

I'm Chuck Otte.